

Sea deals another blow to LBI dunes

Sand trucked in to protect homes

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LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP — Two Ocean Boulevard homes, assessed at \$2.1 million each, gave new meaning Wednesday to the phrase "waterfront property."

Wind-driven waves from a mild cold front Tuesday night and Wednesday morning swept sand from under the homes, leaving 6 feet of supporting bulkhead pilings exposed and 6-by-6 beams dangling 2 feet from the nearest solid ground.

Township Commissioner Robert Palmer said municipal officials approved an emergency appropriation of \$150,000 to pay for sand to be trucked in to rebuild the 18- to 20-foot dunes that overnight were worn down to half their size, swept away by the ocean.

In the North Beach section, 20-foot dunes were also severely damaged, appearing sheared in half, Palmer said, though no homes were threatened.

This most recent case of erosion again focused attention on the multimillion-dollar beach replenishment and storm protection project that is pending in five of the six towns that share the island. The project is in jeopardy because many homeowners have refused to sign access and work easements needed to do the work. Long Beach Township needs approximately 600 easements. As of last week, the township had about 50.

"Mother Nature gave us a telephone call, and I hope some of the oceanfront homeowners answer," Palmer said Wednesday afternoon. "If the winds were consistently at 35 or 40 mph, it might have washed sand away halfway under the houses."

The homes, located between 54th and 55th streets, were still structurally sound, according to township officials.

Beach rebuilt in 2004

Palmer said the same stretch of beach received \$350,000 worth of sand — a 54-truck delivery — from Ocean County only two years ago. The beach, at low tide Wednesday, was 50 feet wide.

"Anyone who doesn't sign the easement has to be absolutely out of their mind," said Bill Hutson, owner of Lorry's Island End Motel in the Holgate section. "If the owners don't sign and we do get a severe storm there will be no one to help them and some of these homes will go under."

Palmer said 20 to 30 truckloads of sand were placed on the beach Wednesday and another 40 to 50 were expected today. Public works employees, using bulldozers and loaders, were expected to rebuild the dune and berm.

"We need that project," John Jones, superintendent for the township public works department, said about the \$71 million replenishment project: "The winds were only around 10 mph and did this. If they were 30-40 mph, there would be water under all these homes."

Jones said the erosion in North Beach would be handled by heavy equipment, working at low tide and using existing sand from the beach.

Merchants concerned

The lack of signed easements island-wide has prompted the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce to hold an executive session today to discuss the impact.

"Businesses on the island are impacted by this project as much as residential property owners," said Ellen R. Johnson, chamber executive director.

Jones said Robert Parker, a public works employee who makes daily beach checks on his own, reported the erosion at about 6:30 a.m. By 7 a.m. the Sahara Sand Mine was contacted and the first trucks arrived at the beach 90 minutes later.

Jones and Palmer noted the two homes in jeopardy were protected by bulkheading. But Palmer said a majority of oceanfront homes in the township lack bulkhead protection.

"The people should be lining up to sign the easements. Instead, they are publicly talking about filing class-action suits," Hutson said. "We had people from 44 states and foreign countries stay at our hotel. This is about more people than the oceanfront property owners."

According to the township tax assessor's office, the homes are owned by Kevin and Patricia Conroy of Saddle River and Richard Olchaskey of South Amboy. They were not at the beach homes Tuesday night and could not be reached for comment Wednesday, but police did reach out to notify them of the damage.

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